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March 17, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pence
Vice President of the United States
The White House
Office of the Vice President
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Vice President,

As the leader of the Administration's 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) task force, I urge you to immediately implement a nationwide public education campaign about what every American must do to slow the spread of COVID-19. While many states and localities have taken steps to prevent the spread of the virus, the lack of clear, national messaging continues to hinder our efforts to "flatten the curve" and reduce the risk of infection and death.

As the number COVID-19 cases continues to surge, Americans are turning to the federal government for guidance. However, widespread confusion reigns about the seriousness of the outbreak, the definition of "social distancing," and the steps that all Americans must take to protect themselves and their communities.

President Trump has personally sowed confusion by underplaying the seriousness of the pandemic and making false claims at a critical point during the initial epidemic. The President gravely misled the American public by stating that the number of COVID-19 cases in the United States is decreasing,¹ that COVID-19 will dissipate in warm weather,² and that COVID-19 is less deadly than the seasonal flu.³ Even as he declared COVID-19 a national emergency in televised address to the American people, President Trump failed to follow guidance on social distancing

¹ "Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force in Press Conference." *White House Press Briefings*. February 26, 2020. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-conference/>

² Crowley, Michael. "Some Experts Worry as a Germ-Phobic Trump Confronts a Growing Epidemic." *Washington Post*. February 10, 2020. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-conference/>

³ Kessler, Glenn and Meg Kelly. "Fact-checking President Trump's coronavirus news conference." *Washington Post*. February 28, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/02/28/fact-checking-president-trumps-coronavirus-news-conference/>

by shaking hands with business executives. If our leaders do not follow best practices, we lose an important teaching opportunity.

Additionally, it is vitally important that the Administration uses all forms of media to educate the public on COVID-19, including social media. While healthy young adults may face less severe risk, they can spread COVID-19 to more vulnerable individuals and must be kept informed on best practices. Young adults are most likely to get their news from social media, and are four times more likely to get their news from social media compared to older adults.⁴ Given the preponderance of misinformation, it is critical that the Administration proactively leverage social media to disseminate information about COVID-19, social distancing, and other steps to slow the spread of this pandemic.

Please provide responses to the following questions regarding the Administration's public education strategy no later than March 24:

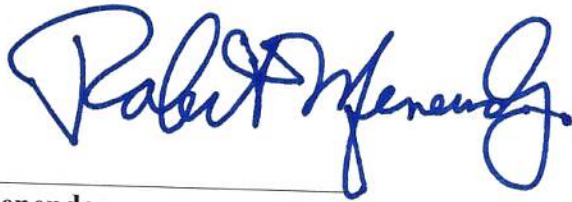
- As of today, March 17 2020, how is the Administration disseminating information to the American public about COVID-19, social distancing, and other steps to slow the spread of this pandemic?
- How does the Administration plan to continue to provide information and guidance to the American public this week (March 17-24, 2020) about COVID-19, social distancing, and other steps to slow the spread of this pandemic?
- As of today, March 17, 2020, what forms of media is the Administration using to educate the American public on COVID-19, social distancing, and other steps to slow the spread of this pandemic?
- What forms of media does the Administration plan to use this week (March 17-24, 2020) to educate the American public about COVID-19, social distancing, and other steps to slow the spread of this pandemic?
- How is the Administration specifically using social media to educate Americans about COVID-19, social distancing, and other steps to slow the spread of this pandemic?
- How does the Administration plan to use social media this week (March 17-24, 2020) to educate Americans about COVID-19, social distancing, and other steps to slow the spread of this pandemic?
- How is the Administration disseminating information about COVID-19, social distancing, and other steps to slow the spread of this pandemic to non-English speakers?
- How does the Administration plan to disseminate information about COVID-19, social distancing, and other steps to slow the spread of this pandemic to non-English speakers this week (March 17-24, 2020)?
- What messaging guidance and tools have the Administration shared with state and local entities about COVID-19 and specifically about social distancing?

⁴ Shearer, Elisa. "Social media outpaces print newspapers in the U.S. as a news source." *Pew Research Center*. December 10, 2018. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/10/social-media-outpaces-print-newspapers-in-the-u-s-as-a-news-source/>

- How has the Administration developed messaging guidance for state and local entities about COVID-19 social distancing, and other steps to slow the spread of this pandemic?

This is a critical moment for our country, and we must deploy every resource to fighting this pandemic. To prevent further catastrophe, I urge you to immediately implement a nationwide public education campaign to ensure that every American understands their role in slowing the spread of COVID-19. Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this pressing matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and a stylized "M".

Robert Menendez
United States Senator